

Walking the extra mile for higher education

By Edwin Chandra
reporters@theborneopost.com

KUCHING: With more time in hand, Professor Datuk Khairuddin Abdul Hamid plans to do more research, attend to students' needs and help fellow colleagues out at the faculty.

"First and foremost, I am a professor and my real job is to teach and supervise students — providing consultancy services and also serving to the community," the former Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) Vice Chancellor said, alluding to his new routines.

Prof Khairuddin, known fondly as Prof K among colleagues and students, has been leading Unimas since 2008 as the fourth VC.

He has passed the baton to his successor, Professor Dato' Dr Mohamad Kadim Suadi, the former Deputy Vice Chancellor (research & innovation) of Universiti Teknologi Melaka (UTEM).

"The VC job is the managerial part of a professor. It's a challenging undertaking because we are not trained as managers nor financial controllers nor human resource managers," Prof K explained.

"We are trained in our own field and as for me, I was trained as an electronic systems engineer. But maybe because we in the academic environment, we are all here to learn."

Important appointments

Even though he has chosen to remain with Unimas after the expiry of his tenure as the VC, Prof K still holds a lot of important academic posts at both the state and national levels.

He is now chairman of the Technical Committee on the Cooperation between Malaysia and Infosys Technologies Ltd of India — a position he has held since 2007.

"The National Committee is for cooperation between the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) and Infosys India in training ICT graduates to become good software developers and engineers."

"The cooperation has been going on since 2007 with overwhelming results," he said.

Prof K who has been with Unimas since 1992, is also chairman of the National Information Technology Council (NITC) Expert Group on Information Communication Technology (ICT) Human Capital Development.

He has chaired the National Taskforce on Human Resource Development Framework for ICT the past three years and still heads U-SCORE, Sarawak.

He is actively involved with the National Professor Council Working Group on Human Capital Development for ICT Cluster as one of the directors.

The former ex-officio of the National Science and Research Council was the founding director of the Centre of Excellence for Rural Informatics where he was involved in various researches, especially

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in the development of Information Technology in the rural areas.

Some of the research projects have received numerous international and local awards, most notably for the e-Bario projects.

"Now I have more free time for my family — my children and myself. For the past 20 years, they have sacrificed so much for me. They can actually demand time from me but they have never done that," Prof K said.

"With more time in hand, I will reorganise myself as a professor and see how I can better contribute better to the students and the university."

"Still I'm busy chairing a number of national committees and, of course, I will still need to travel around."

Here to stay

Prof K was responsible for the planning and development of Malaysia's first boutique university in Cyberjaya under MOHE. He was shortlisted as the leading candidate to get the university going but declined the offer because of his commitment to Unimas.

Prof K, the founding dean of Unimas' Faculty of Engineering, said he had a soft spot for Sarawak and had no intention to move elsewhere after stepping down from the Number One post at the university.

He had personally been involved with Unimas since day one and was among those in charge of its overall development.

From the humble beginning with just a temporary campus, the university now has a new modern campus.

Prof K said: "They (Unimas) can now go on auto pilot because we have laid a good foundation. We have groomed good people — both the academic and support staff."

"That's why we can grow and develop very fast. We believe in young talents and giving them opportunities to fulfill their potential and capacity."

He felt the most important job for him at the university was to welcome new students and their parents.

"This is to make them feel they have come to the right university. My feeling is that when they come for their convocation with their parents in attendance and you can see the difference in their faces, you feel you have played a small part in their lives," he said of the fond memories he has had over the



MORE RELAXED: Former Unimas Vice Chancellor Professor Datuk Khairuddin Abdul Hamid now has more time to spend with his family and also prepare for lectures, attend to his student's needs and do research.

years at Unimas.

And for that, Prof K, the former dean for the Faculty of Information Technology, said he has no immediate plans to leave the workplace which is so close to his heart.

Recalling some of the milestones he and his team had achieved over the years, Prof K said bringing Unimas up to be among the top universities in Asia is an accomplishment he cherishes the most.

"We have mustered all the strength through teamwork and hard work, strategic thinking and planning. We're quite happy to have been able to achieve all these in quite a short time," he said, referring to Unimas' world-class ratings attained at the beginning of 2011.

In 2012, the university was ranked in the top 261 bracket and this year, it may be ranked in the top 100.

"One of my personal achievements is bringing Sarawak to the world in terms of academics."

"I think by bringing Unimas to the world, we are also bringing Sarawak to the world. The state now has a good university which is well-known worldwide," he enthused.

Working his way up at Unimas, Prof K, who is an avid swimmer, had served as Head of Department (HOD), Deputy Dean and Dean, and was appointed Deputy Vice Chancellor (research and innovation) and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (student affairs & alumni) before becoming the fourth VC.

He said when first offered the job, he felt ready to shoulder the responsibility, adding: "That's because I was involved with the university from the beginning and I know its philosophy and the vision very well."

To him, Unimas has a clear succession plan and all those involved were in the same team and they understood the whole picture.

He noted that over the past 20 years, there had been very

smooth transition and the baton was passed to the most suitable candidate in the university although it was all right for people from outside to take the helm.

"For us, we were there to continue. We had a vision which is set, shared and agreed to by everybody. It was and not made by an individual."

"Change in the leadership in the university is common but the criteria and process must be followed — there must be consistency in the succession system," he said.

"Choosing leaders is not about making the right decision but also taking into consideration factors which may affect other things."

During a recent farewell dinner, Prof K reminded Unimas staff to



PARTING GIFT: Unimas new VC Professor Datuk Mohd Kadim Suadi presenting Professor Datuk Khairuddin Abdul Hamid (second right) a souvenir during a farewell dinner while Datin Dayang Mariani Abang Zain looked on.

practise the good work ethics of the Japanese whom calls highly disciplined, always punctual, critical of all work procedures, systematic in delivery and respectful of their colleagues.

"Such positive traits are vital to ensure a healthy and happy workplace where everyone will have a fulfilling career at the university," he said.

International recognition

Prof K is happy to leave his previous assignment as the top brass at Unimas because the university is now the seventh top public institution of higher learning (IPTA) in Malaysia and ranked 181 among the 500 universities in the QS Asian University Rankings 2013.

In early March this year, Unimas was presented with the Century International Quality ERA Award by the Geneva-based Business Initiative Directions (BID) group.

Unimas was the first local university to be presented with the international award.

BID president Jose E Prieto had praised the university for its outstanding achievements and for being the testament of success for Malaysia in the world of higher education.

Unimas was presented with the award in recognition of its commitment in delivering quality education, exemplary leadership and for being one of the front runners in the field of technology and innovation.

The award was a special gift for the students, staff and management who were celebrating the University's 20th anniversary at that time.

Prof K said he would always cherish the memories of being the fourth VC, hoping the new leadership would continue developing quality human capital and remain as a premier choice for those seeking higher education.



VIP GUESTS: Prof Khairuddin hosting Head of State, Tun Datuk Patinggi Abang Saiahuddin and his wife Toh Puan Hajah Norkiah during 'Unimas' Annual Convocation.



PROUD MOMENT: Prof Khairuddin (left) receiving the Century International Quality ERA Award from Jose E Prieto, president of the Geneva-based Business Initiative Directions (BID) group.



INFOSYS: Prof Khairuddin (sixth right) has held the position of national chairman of the Technical Committee on the Cooperation between Malaysia and Infosys Technologies Ltd of India, Khairuddin since 2007. He is seen here with participants of the Faculty Enablement Programme (FEP).